

AFRICOM's Role in Africa
Major Alan C. Hardman

“Pursuing professionalism?” is the question every African government should be asking it's armed forces. Paradoxically, this question is the answer to “Why do Africans dislike U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM)?”, and the reason I started this paper. Even the most cursory research effort uncovers a litany of articles outlining opposition to AFRICOM. AFRICOM is the U.S. military command tasked with promoting democracy, good governance and solving transnational problems in Africa.¹ Growing up in South Africa, I learned that Africans want to solve African problems without foreign interference. African resistance to AFRICOM made sense to me. The counter arguments resonated and I was expecting to side with the sentiment opposing AFRICOM. Thinking through this paper, I realized that in addition to the desire to solve problems, Africans need the appropriate tools. AFRICOM provides the tools of professional education and military to military assistance to those countries willing to accept it. After considering the evidence I believe AFRICOM's strategy of professionalizing African militaries is the best approach to achieving the U.S. foreign policy goals of promoting democracy, good governance, and solving transnational problems in Africa.

AFRICOM was established by presidential order in 2007, and achieved full operational capability by 1 October 2008.² AFRICOM is touted as a critical component of U.S. efforts to build a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Africa.³ AFRICOM works towards the foreign policy objectives by supporting efforts to build professional militaries which respect civilian control.⁴ The focus on military respect of civilian control is an important element of African foreign policy because African militaries still tend to intervene in African politics.⁵ African militaries prefer ‘democratic coups’ where the military stages a coup, then withdraws to hold and win the next election.⁶ From its beginning AFRICOM attracted criticism from African leaders. A quote from the August 2009 Military Review article, *Misguided Intentions: Resisting*

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AFRICOM, sums up the sentiment, “What African leader will welcome a military organization to teach him democracy and good governance?” *AFRICOM* in response to the criticism explained that professional militaries respect civilian control, which in turn fosters an environment for economic and social development.⁷ The arguments opposing *AFRICOM*'s approach of professionalization fall into three broad categories: civil-military theory, African leader desire, and negative consequences.

In his classic work, *The Soldier and the State*, Samuel P. Huntington developed a general theory of civil-military relations outlining the role of military professionalism. Huntington, often considered the benchmark⁸ for civil-military studies, cites military professionalism as the condition which maximizes civilian control of the military. As Huntington states, “The one prime essential for any system of civilian control is the minimizing of military power. Objective civilian control achieves this reduction by professionalizing the military, by rendering them politically sterile and neutral.”⁹ *AFRICOM*'s focus on professionalism is clearly based on Huntington's notion of objective control. Critics assert that traditional civil-military theory is not applicable, and cannot be applied to the African continent. Because it was developed after a study of western states and institutions, critics assert Huntington's civil-military theory is not applicable to the African context.¹⁰ In a nut shell, Huntington's civil-military theory is labeled “Western centric”.¹¹ This argument rests on the assumption that African and western militaries are so different as to render western civil-military theory invalid. Dr. Naison Ngoma, author of *The Myths and Realities of Civil Military Relations in Africa*, disputes the notion that African and western militaries are fundamentally different in character.¹² Rather he says, it is the degree of socio-political and economic development which influence the nature of civil-military relations.¹³ As internal conditions of African countries become similar to those of western

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countries so too do their civil-military relations begin to reflect 'western' characteristics. South Africa is one African example where the internal state of development has approached western levels. Consequently, the country exhibits a more "western centric" model of civil-military relations.¹⁴ Ngome concludes, "In the final analysis the African military is like all other in the world including the West."¹⁵ Thus it is apparent that the applicability of Huntington's objective model cannot be dismissed. Huntington's objective model and its focus on professionalism is applicable to the African context. The assumption is not that professionalism will lead to democracy but that military respect for civilian control creates a permissive environment in which development can occur. Development, in turn, will set the conditions for more stable democratic governance and civil-military relationships where the military is not involved in determining who will rule the country.

Next critics question the will of African leaders to pursue an agenda of military professionalization. Because remaining in power oftentimes requires military support leaders are apt not support military professionalization.¹⁶ Professional militaries are characterized by their non-involvement in political determination of leadership which poses a threat to regimes depending on military support.¹⁷ However, the evidence shows African leaders themselves are calling for, and implementing, professional reforms. General Djindere, Armed Forces Chief of Burkina Faso, in his article Democracy and the Chain of Command: A New Governance of Africa's Security Sector, identifies a multitude of African countries pursuing professional reforms.¹⁸ Sierra Leone is pursuing the development of a national threats-based defense and security force (DSF). In the words of Djindere, "Well conceived national security plans are signs of military professionalism and enable proactive, flexible, and rapid response to threats."¹⁹ Mali, Senegal, Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania, and Malawi are using codes of conduct and training to

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develop professional DSF. Botswana, Malawi, Senegal, Tanzania, Mauritius and Burkina Faso all promote 'republican' values within their DSF's. 'Republican' values, as described by Djindere, are the values of respect for citizen rights and political freedoms especially during democratic elections.²⁰ Nigeria and South Africa are focusing on improving civil-military relations as a way to professionalize the DSF's. The South African Defense and Security Management network is an example of an initiative which fosters cooperation between civil and military society. Furthermore, organizations like the United Nations and the African Union promote good civilian governance as an essential part of democracy. Good civilian governance significantly reduces the threat of military involvement in political determinations of government.

Last, critics of AFRICOM's involvement in developing professionalism foresee negative outcomes for the people of Africa rather than positive outcomes.²¹ Professionalization and capacity building, they argue, leads to a propensity to use military force for problem solving rather than the use of more peaceful civil institutions.²² This argument, however, is not supported by conventional foreign policy wisdom, which asserts that there cannot be development without security and vice versa.²³ Furthermore, the African Union's Peace and Security Council definitively recognizes that security, development and democratic governance are inextricably linked.²⁴ Establishing security in African countries is a key element in facilitating the development needed to bring prosperity to the African people. Professionalism and capability building provide the means to establishing the security environment for development. Development and socio-economic stability drive positive changes to African civil-military relations which will begin to reflect the western civil-military model of governance devoid of military intervention in political determination.

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Uganda provides an illustrative case study of the multiplying benefits and possibilities that flow from a program of professionalizing DSF's. The professional DSF's of Uganda provide regional stability. Additionally, the U.S. to Uganda military to military relationship provides the U.S. with political leverage in the region.

Uganda's DSF's participate in AFRICOM's International Military Education and Training (IMET) program, and the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program. IMET makes funds available for international personnel, civilian and military, to attend U.S. military professional education programs.²⁵ The IMET program objectives are to enhance regional security through military to military relations, provide training which augments participant nation capability, and improves the ability of participants to instill and maintain democratic values at home.²⁶ Additionally, the education includes comprehensive instruction on budgets, promotions, civilian control, adhering to standards, codes of conduct, and military justice.²⁷ Uganda regularly participates in ACOTA and is a major contributor of forces to the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM).²⁸

Participation in IMET and ACOTA has created a capable, professional Ugandan DSF which has become instrumental in regional security efforts. Uganda's contribution to AMISOM is an example of how their DSF's contribute to regional stability. Ugandan troops are deployed to Mogadishu, Somalia as part of the plan to displace the terrorist organization al Shabaab.²⁹ Uganda is considered the backbone of the effort, and provides two thirds of the 9000 AMISOM peacekeeping forces.³⁰ Ugandan peacekeeping forces enable the necessary security environment in which to pursue political and economic solutions.³¹ Because of Uganda's participation in ACOTA its DSF's are now professional and competent enough to receive high tech assistance from the U.S. Uganda's AMISOM troops will receive four drone aircraft, surveillance systems,

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body armor and night vision equipment from the U.S.³² Additionally, the Ugandan DSF's are working with the U.S. to disrupt the regional destabilizing activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA has conducted a campaign of violence in Northern Uganda, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo for many years.³³ Because of its improved professionalism Uganda, with U.S. assistance, is able to conduct multinational operations with the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda against the LRA. Both the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda armed forces have previously received training from AFRICOM.³⁴ Such expanded scope and coordination between nations improves the probability of success against the LRA, thereby promoting regional stability. Additionally, U.S. and Ugandan military to military operations provide Washington a platform from which to expand political influence in the region. This opportunity may prove critical to Washington in a region now dominated by Chinese influence. Highlighting the political benefits of AFRICOM's programs, a STRATFOR analysis asserts, "By deploying troops to Uganda, the United States, can continue to assert itself in the region, aiming eventually to usurp the favorable Chinese business environment in the region."³⁵

Zimbabwe, by comparison, is a case study in the dangers of pursuing politicization, and not professionalism in an attempt to minimize military influence in politics.³⁶ The Zimbabwean government has historically favored a systemic policy of turning the DSF into an armed extension of the political ruling party.³⁷ By focusing the DSF sectors on regime support politicization was favored over professionalism. Part of the politicization included a recruiting policy which eliminated diversity, and recruited only from the ruling political party Shona tribe. Consequently, governance evolved to the point where Zimbabwe is now, de facto, governed by a group of generals.³⁸ Zimbabwe's approach is the polar opposite of Huntington's objective

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control model. Politicization of the military has decimated military professionalism and created an internal focus which has been disastrous for the country. Zimbabwe's governance is ranked 51 out of 53 African countries on the 2011 Ibrahim Index of African governance, Uganda is ranked 20th on the Ibrahim Index.³⁹ Governmental focus has been on preserving power not development. Zimbabwe's economy is ranked 46 (dead last) out of the 46 Sub-Saharan African countries on the Heritage Foundation's economic freedom list. Uganda by comparison is ranked 7th out of the 46 countries included.⁴⁰ In a statement which echo's AFRICOM's approach Jeremiah Williamson, Editor-in-Chief, Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies asserts, "Huntington's theory, however, and the scholarship that has followed it provide sufficient guidance to set Zimbabwe on the path to objective civilian control and, thus, to set the stage for democratic society ruled by law."⁴¹ But the biggest endorsement for AFRICOM's approach is found in Williamson's recommendation to professionalize the Zimbabwean defense and security sectors. Professionalism he argues is the process that will restore civil society's respect for the armed forces and facilitate an external mission focus.⁴² Williamson's proposed mechanism for this transformation is AFRICOM's IMET program. Countries with militaries that have a clear external mission focus tend towards a civil military relationship characterized by civilian control.⁴³ Zimbabwe stands as a representative example of what can happen if policy makers buy into the critic's arguments opposing AFRICOM's strategy of professionalizing the DSF. In Zimbabwe's case there is a political structure which has no interest in professionalizing the DSF. However, in light of the multitude of African countries pursuing a DSF professionalization agenda Zimbabwe stands out as an exception not the norm. Additionally, in the Zimbabwean case not pursuing professionalism has resulted in the very oppression critics argue

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professionalization creates. As described by Williamson the pathway to reform is marked by the road signs of professionalism and AFRICOM.

AFRICOM has been the focus of criticism for its strategy of professionalizing and strengthening defense institutions in African states. Critics have questioned the applicability of western civil-military theory, alleged that African leaders are not committed to professionalizing their armed forces, and claimed that professionalism leads to more oppressive governments not less. Each of these criticisms has been examined and shown to fall short of its claims.

Huntington's theory of objective control is applicable to the African context and an appropriate approach for AFRICOM. General Djindere's article on Democracy and the Chain of Command: A New Governance of Africa's Security Sector, highlights a number of countries pursuing an agenda of professionalization for their defense and security sector institutions. These professionalization agendas are the touchstones on the journey to a fully professional defense sector. Critics tend to undermine the progress of African countries by focusing on what hasn't been achieved instead of what has been achieved. Uganda is one example that clearly illustrates the benefits of AFRICOM's approach of providing the tools of military professionalism to those countries interested in acquiring them. Uganda's professional armed forces are enabling regional stability and security in East Africa. Stability and security are essential components for socio-economic development. Greater socio-economic development fosters more normative civil-military relationships where the military is not part of the political process of determining governmental leadership. Zimbabwe is a cautionary example of the dangers of not professionalizing the country's defense and security institutions. Without professionalism and objective control the defense and security sector institutions focus inward on regime support not external defense. This inward focus has a distinctly negative effect on socio-economic

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development. The African continent is not short of democratic nations⁴⁴, but it is short of stable democratic governments free from the threat of military intervention. Every African government should be demanding professionalism from their armed forces.

¹ Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights. "AFRICOM: Promoting Partnership for Global Security in Africa." *Committee on Foreign Affairs*. July 26, 2011. <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearings.asp?committee=17> (accessed November 5, 2011).

² U.S. Africa Command. *About U.S. Africa Command*. August 1, 2011. www.africom.mil/AboutAFRICOM.asp (accessed October 17, 2011).

³ U.S. House Foreign Affairs. *AFRICOM: Promoting Partnership for Global Security in Africa*. July 2011. <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearings.asp?committee=17> (accessed October 17, 2011)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Mathurin C. Hounnikpo, *Guarding the Guardians: Civil-Military Relations and Democratic Governance in Africa*. (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2010), vii.

⁶ Mathurin C. Hounnikpo, *Guarding the Guardians: Civil-Military Relations and Democratic Governance in Africa*. (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2010), vii.

⁷ Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights. "AFRICOM: Promoting Partnership for Global Security in Africa." *Committee on Foreign Affairs*. July 26, 2011. <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearings.asp?committee=17> (accessed November 5, 2011).

⁸ Peter D. Feaver and Erika Seeler. "Before and After Huntington: The Methodical Maturing of Civil-Military Studies." In *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 72.

⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), 84.

¹⁰ Decalo, *Civil-Military Relations in Africa*, 190.

¹¹ Hounnikpo, *Guarding the Guardians: Civil-Military Relations and Democratic Governance in Africa*, 170.

¹² Naison Ngoma, "The Myths and Realities of Civil Military Relations in Africa and the Search for Peace and Development." *Journal of Security Sector Management* 4, no. 1 (2006), 8.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Decalo, *Civil-Military Relations in Africa*, 190.

¹⁷ Ibid.

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- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Jeremy Keenan, "US militarization in Africa." *Anthropology Today* 24, no. 5 (October 2008), 19.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Jan Bachmann, "'Kick Down the Door, Clean up the Mess, and Rebuild the House"-The Africa Command and Transformation of the US Military." *Geopolitics* 15, no. 3 (2010), 574.
- ²⁴ African Union. "Peace and Security Council." *African Union*. April 27, 2011. <http://www.au.int/en/content/declaration-ministerial-meeting-peace-and-security-africa> (accessed November 5, 2011).
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- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ U.S. Africa Command. *2011 Posture Statement United States Africa Command*. April 2011. <http://africom.mil/research.asp> (accessed October 30, 2011), 6.
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- ³⁶ Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Nationalist-Military Alliance and the Fate of Democracy in Zimbabwe." *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* (African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD)) 6, no. 1 (2006): 53.
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- ³⁹ The Heritage Foundation Leadership For America. *2011 Index of Economic Freedom*. November 2011. <http://www.heritage.org/index> (accessed November 5, 2011).
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⁴² Ibid., 405.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ U.S. Department of State. *Diplomacy in Action*. October 1, 2011.
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